

screamed soundlessly from behind thick glass; and then the flames began to rouge the face of the sky. Thus artificially lit, the city seemed to be fluxing amidst a turbulence of intelligent light, that world encoded within the shimmering, atomic structures of magazine covers, advertisement hoardings, movie fly-posters, the screens of TVs, VCs and PCs; another universe, a hyperuniverse that interpenetrated our own, seeping from the receptacles of the mediascape, undisturbed by the disruptions of sunlight, when all deliquesced, when Earth2, diluted, was incapable of materializing, of bodying itself forth, of tearing open the membrane that separated the worlds.

The Wound was everywhere and nowhere; tonight, it bled generously; I tried not to think of the meagre hours that insulated us from the dawn, the zero hour when information would be sucked back into itself, when The Wound would cauterize.

Dahlia leaned against me, fully assembled, physical, real as this continent's big cold vacancy. "He's gone for good now. Relax."

"He came back – he said he would always come back."

"Forget him. It's easy. I've forgotten my step-mother."

I put my arm around her, my fingers running through the pelts of luxuriant furs that smothered her small, but prescient body. Forget him? It had been easier to forget my parents than my stepfather. In the rear-view mirror towers – white, glistening began to collapse, dripping like melting popsicles; the city exploded into light, just as reality had exploded some

15 years ago when the fibresphere had first infected us. "You saved me," I said.

"We saved each other. Always have. You rescued me from Earth2, and I intend to rescue you from Earth1."

"I'm your slave."

"You're my friend. I'll haunt you. I'll always haunt you."

"Promise?" The Bentley's cleated wheels rumbled against the heated surface of the highway. The black *nada* of the ice fields surrounded us; above, a diamond-riddled sky. I aimed the car at the horizon where Mt Erebus rose from the frozen bay, belching fumes.

"Promise."

"Where to now?"

"To wherever it takes."

To Wilkes Land? To Queen Maud? Or back to Marie Byrd, Ellsworth and the karaoke-rich Riviera of the Antarctic Peninsula?

The world was a cold place – no matter where you travelled, you suffered its chill. Dahlia swung a thigh over mine – time yet for dildonics, for cojone-baloney – and put the Bentley into fourth.

To Cythera, I thought.

Richard Calder, who lives in Thailand, is author of the novels *Dead Girls* (1993), *Dead Boys* (1994) and *Dead Things* (1996), all published by HarperCollins. When Takayuki Tatsumi refers to "cyber-Orientalism" in his essay on J.G. Ballard (see earlier this issue) we suspect that he has Richard Calder's fiction very much in mind – a slim collection of his four previous stories from *Interzone* was published in Japan at Tatsumi's initiative.

non-linear condensed novels in *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970) into the linear narrative *Crash*; and Pynchon completed the encyclopedic novel *Gravity's Rainbow*. It seems natural that the techno-sexual zeitgeist of the 70s inspired both writers and their innovative literary forms. Historically, one could claim, it is this coincidence between Ballard and Pynchon in 1973 that later gave rise to the Cyberpunk movement in the 1980s.

In retrospect, however, it seems that it was not only the Cyberpunks but also Ballard himself who felt it necessary to reconstruct the central topic of *Crash* in the 80s. Read again his mainstream bestseller *Empire of the Sun* (1984), which was published in the same year as William Gibson's canonical cyberpunk *Neuromancer*, and you will notice that this Booker Prize nominee shares something with *Crash*.

Firstly, both novels are exceptionally autobiographical for they share a main character called "James," created in the image of James Graham Ballard himself. Secondly, whereas *Crash* deals with a scientist obsessed with heterosexual double-suicide in a car crash, *Empire of the Sun* depicts a boy obsessed with international double-suicide in a kamikaze crash: "The fliers fascinated Jim, far more than Private Kimura and his Kendo armour.... Above all, Jim admired the kamikaze pilots.... Neither Private Kimura nor the other guards in the camp paid the least attention to the suicide pilots, and Basie and the American seamen in E Block referred to them as 'hashi-crashies' or 'screw-siders'.... But Jim identified himself with these kamikaze pilots and was always moved by the threadbare ceremonies that took place beside the runway" (*Empire of the Sun*, Chapter 23, "The Air Raid," Pocket Books, pages 198-199). Furthermore, Jim's deepest admiration for the bravery of kamikaze pilots makes him feel like "joining the Japanese Air Force" (Chapter 26, "The Cemetery Garden," page 216).

This episode carries us to our third point, that the analogy between the car crash and kamikaze crash was already predicated in the text of *Crash*. After his own car-crash experience, the narrator Ballard speculates on the disjunction between "my own body, the assumptions of skin, and the engineering structure which supported it," and recollects staring at the cockpit of a World War II Japanese Zero fighter aircraft at the Imperial War Museum: "The blurring perspex of the cockpit canopy contained a small segment of the Pacific sky, the roar of aircraft warming up on a carrier deck thirty years before" (*Crash*, Chapter Seven, Granada, page 58). Whenever we come across dead or failed pilots and astronauts in

Ballard's fiction, we are tempted to take them as representing his anti-outer space and therefore anti-American sensibility. But, rereading *Crash* together with *Empire of the Sun* will give us a chance to reconsider the status of dead pilots as not only ideological but also deeply erotic.

So far as Ballard is concerned, we cannot distinguish between Eros and Thanatos very easily. What is more, Ballard's techno-sexual rhetoric is closely intertwined with his international politics. While the allegedly techno-sexual novel *Crash* already concealed an international romance within the analogy between cars and kamikaze Zero fighter aircraft, the allegedly quasi-autobiographical *Empire of the Sun* contains an imaginatively techno-sexual implication in the depiction of the international friendship between the British boy and the Japanese kamikaze he admires so much. This is why Jim simulates double-suicide with the kamikaze:

For so long he had invested all his hopes in this young pilot, in that futile dream that they would fly away together, leaving Lunghua, Shanghai and the war forever behind him. He had needed the pilot to help him survive the war, this imaginary twin he had invented, a replica of himself whom he watched through the barbed wire. *If the Japanese was dead, part of himself had died.* (*Empire of the Sun*, Chapter 41, "Rescue Mission," page 363, italics mine)

In Japan, we have long been familiar with the postwar "queer" analogy – of the USA as the husband and Japan as the wife. Pax Americana has long feminized Japan. Ballard gives the old analogy a new twist by setting up a hyper-queer viewpoint of a British boy, who feels homoerotic sympathy with a Japanese kamikaze literally murdered or figuratively raped by the American army. When Jim realizes that "If the Japanese was dead, part of himself had died," it may be that he feels himself to have been raped by the Americans, who have already dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

What complicates this catastrophe, however, is that the novel also implies that Jim will recover from the sense of loss sooner or later, and start over his life. Certainly Jim appreciates Japanese bravery, but he also enjoys being "raped" by a stronger high technology represented by the B-29: "...the sight of this immense bomber with its high, curving tail convinced Jim that the Japanese had lost the war. ... Jim thought intently about B-29s. He wanted to embrace their silver fuselages, caress the nacelles of their engines" (*Empire of the Sun*, Chapter 27, "The Execution," page 236). Jim's homo-erotically interna-

tional romance with brave Japanese kamikazes turns out to have been intricately entangled with man's cybersexually fetishistic romance with sophisticated machines. Thus, while *Crash* is as international as *Empire of the Sun*, the latter is as techno-sexual as the former. They constitute a hidden diptych delineating our age, in which deeper investigation into multinational politics cannot do without deeper speculation into techno-sexual rhetoric (or vice versa). This assumption is further endorsed not only by cyberpunk (Gibson, Sterling, Cadigan) and technogothic (Calder, Park, Constantine) but also by Pynchon's fourth novel, *Vineland* (1990), which features contemporary cybersexual and multinational conflicts closely intermingled with supernatural martial arts and brainwashing technologies.

In view of Ballard's his texts – full of numerous American signs ranging from Ernest Hemingway and Elizabeth Taylor to Ronald Reagan and Elvis Presley – we have to be careful about characterizing the Ballardian ambivalence towards the United States. For the time being, nonetheless, we may say that it is through a looking-glass called "Japan" that Ballard feels it more comfortable to efface himself and create another interzone where his British body melts with his American fantasy techno-sexually and multinationally. This is where Ballard's own queer version of "Americanism" came into being, and where we Japanese readers feel greatest sympathy for his fiction, probably for other ambivalent reasons; Ballard's "Americanism" makes us keenly aware that we Japanese also ended up with our own imaginary "hyper-queer" version of Americanism unwittingly, however hard we seem to have studied American culture.

In conclusion, let us also note that the year 1973 saw not merely the coincidental publication of Ballard's *Crash* and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, but also of Kobo Abe's mainstream novel *The Box Man* and Sakyo Komatsu's hardcore sf *Japan Sinks*. In 1973, Ballard and Pynchon tried to speculate on the conflict between the UK/Europe and the United States, or between Americanism on the British part and Occidentalism on the American part, whereas both of the Japanese authors, Abe and Komatsu, focused on the effacement of individual or national identity respectively, eventually promoting the then-popular analogy between the Japanese and the Jew. For Japan to catch up with advanced countries and become more international, it seemed very seductive in the early 70s to accept and redefine self-effacement and

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